

A SACRED GRAPE

A bus-full of travelers are shocked to find that their driver is a tortoise.

There are the usual late arrivals, the usual banging of luggage, the standard fidgeting and babbling, then the door's hiss, an expectant hush, and the tortoise clumps aboard.

"What's that?" screams a fat lady.

"A giant turtle, stupid," mutters her precocious son, age 8.

The tortoise pulls himself onto his seat and revs the engine. The No Smoking sign blinks on.

"Wait! It isn't fair!" wails a nubile girl seated by a thin hayseed. "I'm on this bus to get away from hot-rods and animal husbandry. How will I marry and live genteely in the suburbs if I'm killed or crippled by turtle klutziness?"

"Oh life is vicious, life is tough," keens a little old man in the last row of seats. And the crowd picks up the chant, each person rolling it over and over on his tongue, like a sacred grape he's spent his whole life looking for.

THE INVADERS

"Just a sec" he called, pulling on boots over the feet which had once been called "interesting" by a pretty girl he had never forgotten.

The invaders were coming closer, swigging bottles of looted antifreeze, chomping on blood-and-steel sandwiches.

Like a master sergeant cool in the face of battle but paralyzed with women, he struggled to coax the well-oiled leather over his ingrown toenail, which he had named "Lorraine" in honor of her.

The invaders were much closer -- razing, pillaging, tucking chunks of sidewalk under their shimmering cloaks, raping trees and bushes with their tiny, flower-like organs.

"Nothing can save him now but a blackout or a river with a birchbark canoe," agreed his friends, lugging their possessions on their backs, barely able to watch as the invaders oozed up and, just as he seemed to kiss his foot, attacked.

-- Charles Webb

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